

What to Expect When You Meet with a Legislator



Okay, so you've prepared to meet with your legislator and now you want to know what it's going to be like when you go in. Just remember to stay CALM!

C – Conversation should be led by you

- You made the appointment so you'll have to lead the way
- Introduce yourself and what you came to talk about
 - Don't let the conversation steer too far from your topic
- Remember that no one person should be talking for more than three to five minutes at a time
- Listen attentively when the other person is speaking to you and address their concerns

A – Answer the questions you know and answer the ones you don't know in the follow up letter

- The motto "Fake it 'til you make it?" Leave that at the door.
 - Answer honestly
 - Having all the answers would be great, but it's not something a legislator would expect from you.
 - If you don't know the answer just reply politely with, "I'm not exactly sure about that right now, but when I follow up with you after this meeting I'll be sure to provide you an answer."
 - This is a great segue for your follow-up letter so your meeting can stay fresh in their mind
- Bring a notebook and pen with you to jot down notes

L – Legislators want to hear from you

- You are their constituent – your concerns matter
 - If they support legislation that affects their area, they are more likely to gain support from their people
 - Meeting with them can have an impact – you're not wasting your time
- You bringing up an issue may be their first time hearing about it
 - Raising awareness may help them decide on future bills
 - Knowing that they have a constituent going through something will help influence their future decisions
- You will build valuable working relationships

M – Meeting with an aide or other staff member is okay!

- Sometimes meeting with an aide is even better
 - They may know the legislation better
 - They inform the legislator of your main points and can help influence their decision on whether or not to support your cause

Consider a few things:

- “Leave behind” items are good resources to have when going into the meeting. These can be a quick fact sheet, an informational packet, an organization brochure, or a patient story that relates to your issue and most importantly your contact information
- Make specific requests – ask them to sponsor or support a bill, ask them to speak at an event, or commit to a certain cause
 - If you cannot get a commitment out of them, don’t be discouraged, they could still support your cause
 - In your follow up letter, urge them politely to commit again
- You can meet with your legislator without having an “ask”
 - Sometimes you may just want to send a representative to your local legislator, what does this do? In most cases this is a great way to build a working relationship and raise awareness to your organization
- Leave the politics out of things
 - Even if they’re not the person you voted for or from a party you support, be professional and keep things about you and your cause